

ESCAPING THE ZIONIST CIRCLE: NOTES ON RACIAL CAPITALISM AND THE BLACK RADICAL TRADITION

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ABSTRACT

From the 1947–8 Nakba to the 2023–4 Gaza genocide, the history of Palestine appears to be stuck in a vicious circle of violence from which escape seems increasingly elusive. This leads one to ask, can one ever escape the Zionist circle? The work of Cedric Robinson provides a potential path forward. Since his death in 2016, Robinson's name has become synonymous with the study of racial capitalism. But while racial capitalism was the background of his work, his chief concern was the Black Radical Tradition. Unlike racial capitalism, this concept has remained under-theorised, but without thoroughly accounting for it, our understanding of racial capitalism remains incomplete at best, misguided at worst. In this article, I turn our attention to the Black Radical Tradition and attempt to define it. As Robinson argued, the Black Radical Tradition is not simply derivative of racial capitalism; it actually precedes it and subverts it. Returning to Palestine, I show how Robinson's notion of the Black Radical Tradition can contribute to our understanding of the struggle for Palestinian liberation, and I suggest that at least in some sense, the Palestinians have actually been escaping the Zionist circle all along.

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But history is full of surprises; a being imposed by force and not based on the laws of nature and society cannot last when confronted by living natural forces moving in the stream of history.

—Constantine K. Zurayk (1956 [1948], 7).

The Black Radical Tradition is not a biological reflex, but a reconstitution of historical, cultural, and moral materials, a transcendence.

—Cedric J. Robinson (in Morse 1999, 6).

For a people who have long denied that the Nakba ever occurred, Zionists today seem strangely unashamed about calling for its repetition. Shortly after the October 7, 2023 attacks, Knesset member and Likud Party operative Ariel Kallner took to X/Twitter to publicly proclaim his genocidal bloodlust: ‘Right now, one goal: Nakba! A Nakba that will overshadow the Nakba of 48. Nakba in Gaza and Nakba to anyone who dares to join!’ (*Middle East Monitor* 2023). In calling for such extreme violence against Palestinians, Kallner was not alone. Indeed, virtually the entirety of the Israeli political scene — from the mayors and low-level municipal officials of every two-bit town and kibbutz all the way up to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu himself — demanded the flattening of the Gaza Strip and the annihilation of the Palestinian people. Like Kallner, some of these leaders went so far as to reference the Nakba by name, upholding the ethnic cleansing of the past as a model for Israeli actions in the present. As Minister of Agriculture Avi Dichter — another Likudnik — boasted during a television interview in November, ‘We are now actually rolling out the Gaza Nakba’ (Hauser Tov 2023).

Importantly, the links between the ethnic cleansing of 1947–48 and the genocide of 2023–24 are more than mere metaphor. (While I am following the convention made famous by Ilan Pappé [2006] by describing the 1947–8 Nakba as an example of *ethnic cleansing*, I appreciate the arguments of other scholars who claim that *genocide* is actually a more accurate category. See Ronit Lentin [2018]). As countless Palestinians have argued, the dispossession is ongoing, and the Nakba never really ended. Moreover, real, material connections still exist between the horrors of the past and those of the present. The party which has dominated Israeli politics since the 1970s, the Likud, is the direct descendant of the Irgun, one of the Zionist terrorist groups that unleashed hell on Palestine in the years leading up to Israel’s establishment, and Benjamin Netanyahu’s own father served as the personal secretary of that organization’s founder and spiritual leader, Revisionist Zionist strongman Vladimir Jabotinsky (for a detailed chronology of the Zionist violence of the pre-state period,

see Suárez 2016). Even before Netanyahu convened his war cabinet in October 2023, he had already surrounded himself with a cast of characters tightly connected to the terrorism of the past. Israel's Minister of National Security, the openly racist Itamar Ben-Gvir, is the leader of the Jewish Power Party (*Otzma Yehudit*), a party which was founded by the son of Israel Eldad, the chief ideologue of the most fanatical terrorist group from the pre-state period, the Lehi (or Stern Gang). Israel's Defense Minister, Yoav Gallant — the lumberjack-turned-war criminal who kept bellowing about 'fighting human animals' in Gaza — was named after Operation Yoav, the 1948 ethnic cleansing campaign which swept across the Negev Desert and pushed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians into the Strip. Gallant's father Michael took part in this operation; thus, by wiping out Gaza today, Gallant the younger was attempting to finish the job that Gallant the elder had helped to start (Duek et al 2010). Israel's Finance Minister, Bezalel Smotrich, likewise has the territorial ambitions of yesteryear's terrorists. When he gave a speech in Paris in March 2023, he appeared behind a podium decorated with a map of Greater Israel — a map that very closely resembled the old emblem of the Irgun. And in the weeks following the October 7, 2023 attacks when Israel began calling up reservists in preparation to invade Gaza, the 95-year-old Ezra Yakhin — a former Lehi terrorist who actually participated in the 1948 Deir Yassin Massacre — donned his uniform once again to motivate Israel's troops. Driving from battalion to battalion, he barked at the young soldiers, urging them to '[e]rase them, their families, mothers and children. These animals can no longer live. [...] Every Jew with a weapon should go out and kill them. If you have an Arab neighbour, don't wait, go to his home and shoot him (Uddin 2023)'.²

Thus, to recall William Faulkner's famous line, 'The past is never dead. It's not even past' (Faulkner 2011 [1951]). The Nakba is still with us, and these links to yesteryear also apply to the Palestinians. One by one, the men who founded and continue to lead Hamas are all people who witnessed Zionist butchery first-hand. Several of the organisation's founders were expelled in the Nakba, and many of them later became survivors of the 1956 Khan Yunis Massacre. Likewise, the current leader of Hamas in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar, was born to a family of refugees who had been expelled from their village of al-Majdal — today's Israeli city of Ashkelon — as a result of the aforementioned Operation Yoav. In this sense, the war between Sinwar and Gallant is personal and intergenerational. But, of course, it is not only the politicians and military

2 Yakhin (also sometimes rendered in English as Yachin) authored a book about his days in the Lehi, the most fanatical terrorist group of the Zionist underground. The title of the book, *Elnakam* (meaning 'vengeful God'), had previously been his *nom de guerre* (Yakhin 1992).

leaders who embody this connection to the past. Amongst the Gaza Strip's besieged population are many elderly Palestinians who still remember the original Nakba, people like 90-year-old Fatima Khamees Alyaan Abu-Shammala who told a journalist, 'As long as Israel continues to murder us, destroy our houses, and steal our lands, it's Nakba over and over again' (Abed, n.d.).

Time thus seems caught in a loop — a vicious circle which has no apparent end. Indeed, as early as 1948, Constantine Zurayk, the American University of Beirut professor who coined the term Nakba, bemoaned the inability of the broader Arab community to intellectually come to grips with the ongoing catastrophe. '[T]hey flail around aimlessly in various directions, look now here and now there, and for the most part their thinking turn[s] in a vicious circle' (Zurayk 1956 [1948], 10, emphasis mine). More than two decades later, another Beirut-based intellectual, the radical writer and spokesperson for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) Ghassan Kanafani, similarly lamented the difficulty of escaping this fatalistic loop. Asked to comment on his political group's attempts at resisting Zionism — most notably, their famed plane hijackings — he told an interviewer: 'our own actions, including the planes, were not provocations; they were the movement of a revolution trying to escape from a circle in which it was trapped' (Kanafani 1971, 52).

As all these various examples indicate, both peoples — victim and victimiser, oppressor and oppressed, coloniser and colonised — appear to be trapped in a vicious circle, so much so that even attempts to resist the injustice can sometimes serve to bolster it and what might initially appear as a blow against Zionism can inadvertently end up perpetuating it. In such a situation, how can one ever escape?

In this article, I want to turn to the work of Cedric Robinson and in particular to the relationship between two of his primary concepts: racial capitalism and the Black Radical Tradition. While Robinson's books and essays rarely engage Palestine directly, I believe that his ideas and arguments can prove useful and productive when considered outside of their immediate context (for one of the few examples of Robinson discussing Zionism and Palestine in print, see his essay, 'Fascism and the Intersections of Capitalism, Racism, and Historical Consciousness', Robinson 1983).

Such a transnational approach to Palestine should not be seen detrimentally. Indeed, as Steven Salaita (2006, 178) argues, 'decolonial movements that open themselves to alternative influences are most successful'. While this article is concerned with questions of resistance and liberation, I do not claim to possess any magic wand. I have no recipe for surefire success in fighting oppression, no blueprint for

guaranteed revolution; in fact, I would be quite suspicious of anyone who claimed that they did. Ultimately, what I am concerned with in this article is *conceptualisation* — the way we conceptualise resistance and liberation and the way we conceptualise the types of struggle in which the Palestinians are already engaged. But conceptualisation is no small matter. As Robinson himself once put it, ‘I believe the most important issue is conceptualisation: how are we to conceptualise what we were, what we are, what we are becoming?’ (Robinson 1981: 363). Indeed, by turning to Robinson, I am daring to suggest that perhaps, at least in a certain way, things are not as doomed and fatalistic as they might seem, and that perhaps, at least in some sense, the Palestinians have been escaping the Zionist circle all along.

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In the years that have passed since Robinson’s death in 2016, interest in his work has blossomed. His books are being reissued in glossy, new editions; essays about his ideas are appearing in major, widely-distributed publications like *Boston Review*, *London Review of Books*, and *The Nation*; (see Kelley 2017 and 2021; Makalani 2021; Okoth 2022; Loggins 2022); and he has been the subject of numerous conferences, symposiums, journal issues, anthologies (see Robinson 2019), and even a book-length intellectual biography (see Myers 2021). Thus, if Robinson’s work was once met with a ‘conspiracy of silence’, as Robin D.G. Kelley (2020, xv) argues, things have definitely changed. At last, Robinson has posthumously found his audience as a radical theorist whose work appears readymade to speak to our current Black Lives Matter era, and as a result, he is in the process of being transformed into something of an icon.

Iconisation, however, does not come without its perils. For better or worse, great and innovative thinkers often become associated with one single, Big Idea — a word or concept that comes to completely define them. Here, one might recall numerous examples: Benedict Anderson and imagined communities, Hannah Arendt and the banality of evil, Kimberlé Crenshaw and intersectionality, W.E.B. Du Bois and double consciousness, or Edward Said and Orientalism. Like an academic version of a Che Guevara t-shirt, these Big Ideas represent attempts to condense complicated intellectuals into simplistic slogans — catchphrases that everyone uses but few fully understand. Something is indeed lost in this process of iconisation, and these various thinkers are often reduced to crude, monosyllabic versions of themselves. This same danger also hangs over the growing popularisation of Cedric Robinson, particularly with respect to his association with one of his key concepts: *racial capitalism*.

As has been widely noted, Robinson did not coin the term racial capitalism even if he is correctly identified as one of its most important

theorists. Rereading his oeuvre today, however, one is struck by something very odd; he scarcely mentions it. In Robinson's writings, racial capitalism may always be lingering in the background, but he barely uses the phrase at all. Racial capitalism appears by name a total of five times in *Black Marxism* (2020 [1983]) (only four times in the original edition) and just once in his final book, *Forgeries of Memories and Meaning* (Robinson 2007). The term never occurs at all in his three other books, *The Terms of Order* (Robinson 2016 [1980]), *Black Movements in America* (Robinson 1997), and *An Anthropology of Marxism* (2019 [2001]). Thus, while I do not deny either the importance of interrogating racial capitalism or the contribution that Robinson made to that endeavour, I find it extremely peculiar that his name has become virtually synonymous with a term that he himself so scarcely employed.

The problem, I believe, is not the focus on racial capitalism per se but its disconnection from that other major concept in Robinson's work, the *Black Radical Tradition*. If, on the one hand, reams of paper have been printed and pools of ink have been spilled in order to explicate and understand racial capitalism, Robinson's other major concept — the Black Radical Tradition — has largely been under-explored and under-theorised. Even when it is invoked by Robinson's readers, it is often misunderstood. One recent essay, for instance, suggests that the Black Radical Tradition is simply a shorthand way to refer to those Black intellectuals throughout history who have grasped the racial nature of capitalism (Dantzler et al 2022). Such a view treats the Black Radical Tradition as derivative, as something that comes *after* racial capitalism, as a critical response to it.

The point I am trying to make here is not simply that we should reverse course by ignoring racial capitalism and instead concentrating on the Black Radical Tradition. Rather, my point is that our understanding of racial capitalism remains incomplete at best and wholly incorrect at worst if we do not sufficiently take the Black Radical Tradition into account. What, then, is the Black Radical Tradition? To come to some sort of understanding of what Robinson intended with this phrase, let us turn to each of those three words, one-by-one, starting from the very end.

1. Tradition

Quite simply, Black radicalism has a tradition, a heritage. While most supporters of Black resistance today might initially agree with this statement by pointing out the links between, say, Black Lives Matter on the one hand and the Black Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s on the other, Robinson is indicating something of a far grander scale. His concern is not just with decades but with centuries, with eons. His

historical vision stretches back deep into misty African antiquity, even long before the advent of the Atlantic slave trade. For many would-be radicals, this might seem like sheer lunacy. Think, for instance, of Frank Wilderson's provocative claim that 'there is no narrative moment prior to slavery', that 'there is no way to Africa through the Black' (Wilderson 2010, 27, 47). How could Black resistance to racial capitalism precede racial capitalism itself? And yet, this bold reversal is precisely what Robinson has in mind. As he describes the enslaved African men and women in one of the most quoted and poetic passages of *Black Marxism*:

the cargoes of laborers also contained African cultures, critical mixes and admixtures of language and thought, of cosmology and metaphysics, of habits, beliefs, and morality. These were the actual terms of their humanity. These cargoes, then, did not consist of intellectual isolates or deculturated Blacks — men, women, and children separated from their previous universe. African labor brought the past with it, a past that had produced it and settled on it the first elements of consciousness and comprehension. (Robinson 2020 [1983]: 121–2)

For Robinson, we do a disservice to those Black peoples who have resisted enslavement and white supremacist oppression when we locate the seeds of their rebellion within the oppressive power structures themselves. The Black Radical Tradition is not just a kneejerk, spontaneous response to pain and suffering — a primal scream against the crimes of an allegedly advanced civilisation — but rather, the manifestation of still unvanquished cultural legacies. In fact, this is the best way to understand the long, encyclopaedic sections of *Black Marxism* and *Black Movements in America*. In great detail and with a wide scope stretching across vast historical and geographical contexts, Robinson is attempting to fill in the details, showing case-by-case how the Black Radical Tradition can be glimpsed in the activities of everyone from famed slave insurgents like Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner to the fires of Ferguson, Missouri. '[R]evolutionary consciousness', as Robinson writes, '[...] proceeded from the whole historical experience of Black people and not merely from the social formations of capitalist slavery or the relations of production of colonialism' (Robinson 2020 [1983]: 169).

2. Radical

The Black Radical Tradition refuses to nicely conform to hegemonic frameworks of knowledge and governance. That is, it refuses to stay neatly between the lines of what Robinson called the 'Western paradigms of history' (Robinson 1980: 46). Instead, for Robinson, the Black Radical Tradition slices through these paradigms, escaping them, eviscerating them, transcending them. While Robinson's primary

intellectual adversary on this issue was orthodox Marxism as it was developed and propagated by European intellectuals, he also turned his critical eye to would-be comrades and almost sacrilegiously took issue with some of the most celebrated radical Black figures of his time — people like Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney, and Ousmane Sembene. In his view, each of these individuals, despite their merits, unwittingly duplicated Western frameworks of knowledge, and he argued that their work and thought inadvertently followed the Western line by devaluating the African past, fetishising empirical science, or neglecting the role of mythology, religion, and superstition to political and social struggle (see Robinson 1993: 79–91; Robinson 1975: 15–6; Robinson 1980: 147–58).

This radical aspect of the Black Radical Tradition led Robinson to appreciate one of the most under-studied and yet theoretically and politically significant historical figures of all: the fugitive, the maroon, and the runaway slave. Indeed, his interest in marronage should come as little surprise. By liberating themselves with their own feet, these fugitives enacted literally what Robinson tried to accomplish theoretically: both an escape from dominant ways of thinking, being, and imagining and a reconstitution of shared histories and communities. As he succinctly puts it in *Black Movements in America*, ‘Here was a complete void of the desire for a nation or a nation-state — just a utopia of peace, quiet, and families’ (Robinson 1997: 91). Ultimately, the Black Radical Tradition is itself a theory of fugitivity.

3. Black

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this is easily the most difficult to decipher component of the Black Radical Tradition. Indeed, it might simply be undefinable. George Lipsitz dedicated an entire essay to exploring this topic, ‘What Is This Black in the Black Radical Tradition?’ and he concluded that for Robinson, Black ‘is a politics rather than a pigment, a culture rather than a color’ (Lipsitz 2017: 109). This does not mean that Robinson completely ignored questions of perceived race and racialism like some sort of colour-blind liberal, but rather that he was concerned less with replicating the rigidly defined borders of racial inclusion and exclusion than he was with transcending them, with exploring modes of being and existing which blurred commonly accepted lines.

Robinson was thus very critical of many forms of Black nationalism. In a 1999 interview, he even charged the likes of Stokely Carmichael and Louis Farrakhan as representing ‘a fictive radicalism, a surrogate mirage

of the Black struggle' (in Morse 1999: 1). For Robinson, such militant forms of nationalism merely replicated the discourse of the oppressor, and he was instead interested in exploring the ways that radical Black consciousness could pop up, even in the most unexpected places. Indeed, even Robinson's most prized figure of all — the maroon — was, as he explains, 'not just a Black phenomenon', and in the United States, these communities 'frequently acquired the multicultural and multiracial character that liberal historians of the early twentieth century had expected of the whole nation' (Robinson 1997: 13). In some of his writings, he discusses the suppressed radical tendencies within European societies. Strangely, then, Robinson's critique of Marx was not that he was too European. In a weird way, his critique was that Marx was *not European enough* in the sense that Marx neglected, ignored, or dismissed the great and manifold histories of peasant uprisings and poverty movements that came before him — that is, the radical, oppositional forms of consciousness that existed within Europe itself. This is especially the case for his penultimate book, *An Anthropology of Marxism* (Robinson 2019 [2001]) — a book which, as Avery Gordon remarks, could have been subtitled 'The making of the European socialist tradition' (Gordon 2005: 28).

There was thus a remarkably anti-identitarian and anti-essentialist character to Robinson's view of Blackness, and while he once admitted to an interviewer, 'my happiest and most stunning opportunity for raising hell with corruption and deceit are with other Black people', he simultaneously put forward a notion of Blackness which was tied to *consciousness* rather than to the more typically accepted models of identity (in Morse 1999: 8). As Ruth Wilson Gilmore recalls Robinson once saying to her, 'I've been trying to tell you. It's consciousness, not experience' (Gilmore 2019: xii). After all, as he memorably concluded one of his later essays, 'in prehistory, Africa was the origins of us all' (Robinson 1996: 168).

This, then, is the Black Radical Tradition. As a concept, it passionately animated the majority of Robinson's work and thought, and if we do not sufficiently account for this Black Radical Tradition in our analyses of racial capitalism, then we risk transforming Robinson precisely into what he was not — into a theorist of order or discoverer of laws. Robinson was not a good social scientist in that regard. He mocked the Marxist 'obsession with certainty', and he scoffed at the social scientist for sharing 'with the ideologue the need for an architecture of reality' (Robinson 2016 [1980]: 73). For him, capitalism — that is, racial capitalism — was, despite all the claims of both its advocates and adversaries, not to be understood as order; it was chaos. In an interview, he said, 'I have

never conceded the notion that the West has ordered the world in a rational whole: no coherent order, no singular whole, has ever been forged under the authority of capital and the unifying language of world systems theory simply does not capture the chaos of capitalism' (in Morse, 1999: 7).

As he put it in his very first book, 'the notion of the political order' is a 'mythology' (Robinson 2016 [1980]: 214). Thus, just as Robinson criticised the 'capitalcentrism' of orthodox Marxism, I suspect he would likewise criticise the 'racial capitalcentrism' of some of his interpreters (Robinson 2019 [2001]: 118). There are worlds beyond racial capitalism — different, hidden, oppositional realities. And while we must critique, attack, and oppose racial capitalism, we must never give into the widespread propagandistic lie that elevates racial capitalism to the Alpha and Omega of our being. The continued existence of the Black Radical Tradition proves otherwise.

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What relevance is any of this to Palestine — to the Nakba and the ongoing genocide in Gaza, to the explicitly Zionist form of racial capitalism that has continued to plague us deep into the twenty-first century, and to the long history of Palestinian resistance? Just as Robinson was concerned not only with Black resistance to slavery and racial capitalism in the Americas, so too do I think that his ideas have a great pertinence for our understanding of the struggle for Palestinian liberation. I will therefore conclude by briefly sketching out a few possible ways that Robinson's work can be of value and assistance to us in this important context.

First of all, Palestine is more than a map. It is more than a place, more than a state, and even more than an identity. It is all of these things — but, in addition, it is also a *consciousness*. Viewing Palestinianness in this way can — just as in the case of Blackness — be dangerous, and I, of course, would never argue that someone living a life of privilege on the other side of the world is Palestinian in identity just as much as someone living under occupation in the West Bank. But what Robinson's work indicates is that identity alone cannot fully explain everything that falls under the category of Blackness. It is also a *consciousness* — an idea, a vision, and a commitment — and, as one of the most famed Palestinian intellectuals, Edward Said himself, forcefully argued, so is Palestine.³ Approaching Palestine in this fashion might help us to avoid replicating some of the rigid, hierarchical, identitarian paradigms of Zionism.

3 As Ronit Lentin put it, 'For the late Palestinian intellectual Edward Said, however, Palestine is above all a *consciousness*' (Lentin 2008: 1, emphasis in original). See also the discussion of Palestine as an idea in my book (Burris 2019).

But how do we understand this notion of Palestinian liberation as it relates to Zionism? As we have already seen, the Black Radical Tradition is not entirely derivative from racial capitalism. As Gilmore concisely puts it, ‘the Black Radical Tradition is prior to, during, and after capitalism in all of its forms’ (Gilmore 2019: xii). Palestinian radicalism too has a pre-history. This is not to say that it has not been influenced in a myriad of ways by Zionism; of course, it has. But it also draws on resources that pre-date Zionism, on resources that Zionism has been unable to completely eradicate or vanquish. Just as in the case of the Black Radical Tradition, Palestinians can and do draw from a wealth of cultural resources, of (to borrow Robinson’s words) ‘critical mixes and admixtures of language and thought, of cosmology and metaphysics, of habits, beliefs, and morality’ that existed before the Zionists invaded their lands (Robinson 2020 [1983]: 121–2). For the Palestinians, history did not begin in 1948. It was merely interrupted. And because they are drawing upon these vast but hidden resources, the Palestinians are therefore not simply reacting to Zionist atrocities in some knee-jerk fashion. In some sense, they have been escaping Zionism all along.

Because the Black Radical Tradition goes against our most widely accepted paradigms and frameworks of knowledge, Robinson had to develop ingenious ways to detect its presence in a great variety of historical and geographic contexts. One of the things that he noticed was the absence of mass violence. ‘Why did Nat Turner, admittedly a violent man, spare poor whites?’ he rhetorically asks in *Black Marxism*. ‘Why did Toussaint [L’Ouverture] escort his absent ‘master’s’ family to safety before joining the slave revolution?’ (Robinson 2020 [1983]: 168). Robinson’s answer is simply that the Black resisters and rebels were drawing from different legacies and different cosmologies than those that informed the white slave masters. ‘Blacks’, as he writes, ‘have seldom employed the level of violence that they (the Westerners) understood the situation required’ (ibid: 168).

The level of propaganda aimed at vilifying Palestinian resistance is astounding. Thus, while it may seem completely antithetical to widely accepted notions of reality, the fact of the matter is that the Palestinians, too, have mostly refrained from mass violence. Palestinians have certainly resisted. Indeed, they had been resisting from the beginning, from the very first moment that Zionist settlers set their European feet on Levantine soil and called it theirs. As early as 1890, Palestinians had already dispatched a delegation of dignitaries to Istanbul to lodge an official complaint with the Ottoman authorities, the Sublime Porte, about the strangers taking over their country (Hirst 1977: 28). Resistance continued over the next several decades, taking various guises and forms and reaching its apogee in the six-month general strike that kicked off

one of the greatest anti-colonial uprisings of the twentieth century, the 1936–1939 Arab Revolt. And while Palestinian resistance occasionally turned bloody — most notably, the 1929 massacres in Hebron and Safad — the viciousness of Palestinian violence paled in comparison to that of the colonists (on the 1929 massacres, see Cohen 2015 [2013]). In the face of constant provocation by Zionists in the pre-state period, the Palestinians mostly remained reticent to mimic the terroristic tactics of their adversaries, and even those few Palestinians who did choose the path of violence usually limited themselves to small-scale operations, holding up cars or attacking isolated pockets of settlers rather than indiscriminately bombing popular venues or devising methods of mass murder and wanton destruction.

Between these two populations, there was a vast chasm indeed. Such a difference should not be entirely surprising. As Robinson argued, oppressed and colonized peoples are less prone to mass violence than those self-appointed missionaries of morality and enlightenment who invade their shores, steal their property, and claim their lands. While today spectacles of Palestinian terrorism like the October 7, 2023 attacks immediately capture global headlines, the statistics tell a very different tale. Now, just as then, the Palestinian death count always far exceeds anything experienced by Israeli society. A lone Palestinian gunman or bomber might cause a few deaths and instigate widespread panic, but there are still no Palestinian equivalents to the Israeli tanks, the Israeli bulldozers, the Israeli checkpoints, the Israeli fighter jets, the Israeli prisons, the Israeli detention camps, the Israeli white phosphorus bombs, the Israeli curfews, the Israeli tear gas, the Israeli skunk water, the Israeli apartheid wall, the Israeli sound cannons, the Israeli surveillance drones, the Israeli air force, the Israeli navy, and the Israeli AI-assisted targeting killing systems — not to mention the biggest megillah of all, the Israeli nuclear arsenal. While Israel may not command a complete monopoly on violence, it has certainly claimed the lion's share. In the face of this juggernaut, the Palestinians' overwhelming tendency to shy away from terrorism might have rendered them more susceptible to defeat, but it also demonstrated their possession of something that their adversaries lost long ago: their very humanity. In striving to dehumanise the Palestinians, the Zionists have succeeded only in dehumanising themselves.

This is just one possible method we might be able to use to trace out this Palestinian Radical Tradition. There are, of course, many others. Thus, I will end with the same line that Robinson once humbly offered with respect to the Black Radical Tradition. It also applies to the Palestinians. '[A]s a scholar', he wrote, 'it was never my purpose to exhaust the subject, only to suggest that it was there' (Robinson 2020 [1983]: xxxii).

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